

Brucellosis Coordination Team Minutes

August 26, 2004

Lander, Wyoming

Members Present:

Frank Galey, Ken Mills, John Etchepare, Joel Bousman, Albert Sommers, Terry Cleveland, Terry Kreeger, John Keck, Bill Lambert, Monte Olsen, Bob Wharff, Erika Olson, Bill Williams, Tom Thorne, Rob Hendry, Jim Logan, Bret Combs, Cathy Purves, John Hines, Terry Pollard, Scott Werbelow, Brad Mead, Karl Musgrave, Shawn Madden, Marty Griffith and Donal O'Toole.

Minutes Review:

Rob Hendry moved to approve the minutes. Brad Mead seconded. The vote to approve was unanimous.

Update on Brucellosis Cases in Wyoming:

Dr. Logan detailed the latest case of Brucellosis in Campbell County. He cautioned that the latest case does not indicate that there is an "outbreak" in Wyoming, rather, several isolated incidences. He explained that there were two cows from a Campbell County herd that tested positive for the disease in South Dakota. The epidemiology is continuing. Dr. Combs indicated that the Campbell County effort has been highly coordinated.

Dr. Logan stated that the Campbell County situation is such that the owner will try to test out of the disease, as opposed to full depopulation. There are still details, related to "testing out" that are being discussed. Logan also mentioned the large elk herd that is in close contact to the Campbell County ranch, which commingles regularly with the cattle in the area.

Terry Cleveland highlighted the situation relative to the elk herd in Campbell County and stated that historically, no Brucellosis had been detected in Northeast Wyoming. Cleveland indicated that all of Northeast Wyoming would be covered by hunter surveillance for Brucellosis (blood collection). The effort will expand throughout the state on a rotational basis over the course of the next several years. He also noted that elk area 123 will be net-gunned and tested. Logan indicated that genetics testing on the Brucella cultures will be undertaken, at the behest of Veterinary Services and others.

The group then asked questions of Logan and Cleveland. A question arose concerning how many hunter samples could be expected. Dr. Thorne stated that 15-20% is the norm, but because of the private land ownership, the Department might expect upwards of 50%. The efficacy of net-gunning was then discussed.

The age of the positive cows in Northeast Wyoming was mentioned as being 11 and 12 years, after a question from the Team. Also, in answer to a separate question, Dr. Combs detailed that the cattle herd in Campbell County was not commingled or infused with many outside cattle. Further, the herd was not commingled with wildlife, even when they were located near Pavillion.

Albert Sommers, looking at the big picture, asked what has changed to lead to three separate positive tests. He asked whether the state and APHIS was reviewing the situation from that perspective. Dr. Logan indicated that they were, and noted that the biggest change has been increased surveillance – if it's there you'll find it, if it's not, you won't. Sommers asked how that had changed since 1997. Logan detailed that the amount of testing had drastically increased since 1997. Dr. Combs then said that his agency, together with other agencies, was quite involved in reviewing the "big picture." Rob Hendry asked about the ability to trace cattle back. Dr. Combs stated that all cattle, in most cases, could be traced after they are sent to slaughter. Logan indicated that in a "Free" state, all cattle have to be traceable. He noted that the big difference is that we are doing more to live-test cows. Bob Wharff then asked whether the Game and Fish had numbers to show whether there was an increase in elk numbers in Northeast Wyoming, and followed up with a question related to whether wolves might have chased Brucellosis infected elk into Northeast Wyoming. Terry Cleveland said that there is no evidence to show any such trend (through ear tag traceback, etc.). He also mentioned that there has been no notice of large movements of elk into the area, which would be noted by landowners of the public-at-large.

Bill Lambert asked if the cattle in Northeast Wyoming and Teton County were all vaccinated in 1993. He asked if there was some correlation between the Strain-19 vaccine administered in that timeframe and the rash of positive Brucellosis cases in Wyoming. Logan said that there are studies being undertaken to study the vaccines and adult boosters. He also said that the cultures indicated that the exposure to the Brucellosis in the recent positive cases was likely "recent" and not "chronic." Lambert asked why testing was not being undertaken immediately. Cleveland mentioned that the strain on the animals, upcoming hunting season and cow-calf situation necessitated delaying testing until the Fall.

Cathy Purves asked about game farm elk in Campbell County. Galey followed up with a question about GYA elk being released into the area. Game farm elk were infused into the area, but in the 1950's. Also, GYA elk were brought into the area, but Thorne said that the science, to date, has always noted that a free-ranging, non-feedground elk herd could not self-sustain the disease. He cautioned that if the Rochelle elk herd were found with the disease, a large shift in the Team's work would likely be necessary. More questions surrounding the correlation between the age, vaccination history, vaccine efficacy and positive-Brucellosis cases were then asked. Dr. Combs asked about the possibility of a special hunt in area 123, as the ranchers in the area will need to plan accordingly prior to calving next year and a hunt will allow testing of the elk earlier. Terry Cleveland said that with the consent of the landowner, a depredation hunt could be coordinated. He also said that the Game and Fish was only harvesting the number of

animals that they had access to harvest. Joel Bousman encouraged the Game and Fish to sit down with the landowners to discuss a depredation harvest and negotiate access to hunt the elk.

Rob Hendry asked if the Game and Fish would provide blood test kits to the landowners to hand out to hunters. Bob Wharff asked if there was any chance that someone could go out and infect cows with the disease intentionally. Dr. Logan said that they do not believe it is happening, but that it is possible (disease is easy to harvest and transmit, though). In this case, there are several separate Biovars involved and there is a seeming lack of motive to go to a place without feedgrounds, etc. to infect a herd. Monte Olsen asked whether the Livestock Board and others had sufficient resources to complete the necessary investigations. Logan indicated that they were not sufficiently staffed and lacked sufficient resources at this time. Combs also admitted a lack of manpower and funding, but a willingness to move forward as expeditiously as possible.

Update on GYIBC – Tom Thorne:

Dr. Thorne provided an update to the Team relative to the most recent meeting of the GYIBC. He mentioned the GYIBC's discussion of genetics, real time PCR, lab tour, annual report and MOU (need to be aggressive). The MOU discussion surrounding difficulties with the concept of "eliminating" the disease by 2010 was contentious. However, a compromise was reached. The MOU should be approved and signed within approximately 60 days, pending mainly acceptance by the US Departments of Interior and Agriculture.

Report Review:

The Team then dissolved into discussions related to the Interim Report, which Dr. Galey forwarded to the Team.

Brucellosis in Wildlife: Issues and Topics

The group proceeded to a discussion related to wildlife. Terry Cleveland gave the group an overview of the issue and began the discussion with habitat improvement and acquisition. The Team questioned the carrying capacity for elk, in particular on their winter range. The Team had concerns that determining the carrying capacity might be quite difficult. Rob Hendry mentioned that the Team's concern is not to develop the carrying capacity, for example, but to direct the quantification of such capacity. On a separate note, Dr. Williams noted that there are two ways to attack the issue: either spread elk out or find an efficacious vaccine. John Etchepare added that the situation in Northeast Wyoming may change the "ball game" and that the Team might consider how that case should be accounted for in the collective effort of the group. The Team then reviewed the document entitled Wildlife Brucellosis Issues, with input being given for additions to the "issue" list. Discussion regarding each issue then ensued.

Recommendations:

The group then returned to a discussion of the Interim Recommendations. As a general comment, Frank Galey indicated that all recommendations will be ranked and prioritized prior to submission to the Governor and Legislature.

The Team then took public comment and adjourned for the evening.

August 27, 2004

Lander, Wyoming

Members Present:

Frank Galey, Ken Mills, John Etchepare, Joel Bousman, Albert Sommers, Terry Cleveland, Terry Kreeger, Bill Lambert, Monte Olsen, Erika Olson, Bill Williams, Tom Thorne, Jim Logan, Bret Combs, Cathy Purves, John Hines, Terry Pollard, Scott Werbelow, Brad Mead, Karl Musgrave, Brent Larson, Bob Wharff, Rob Hendry and Donal O'Toole.

Setting of Population Goals for WG&F Department – Scott Smith:

Scott Smith began the day's discussion with a presentation on setting population goals for big game within the WGFD. The goals are set within the constraints of the Planned Management System. The System involves four stages: inventory (where are we), objectives (where do we want to be), actions (how do we get there) and evaluation (did we make it). The inventory stage asks where the animals are (herd units). A herd unit is a geographical area within a discrete animal population. The herd units are then divided into hunt areas to manage the populations. The existing numbers are derived from post-season counts. The objective stage is established with public input (extensive series of public meetings). The objectives are measurable, numeric and quantifiable. The objectives are typically determined by socioeconomics with limits defined by biology. The population objective is derived by balancing the carrying capacity and minimum viable population – the balance is achieved by weighing the socioeconomics. The hunting season was then discussed within the context of the "actions" Stage of the System. Evaluation/monitoring is the final stage in the System. The evaluation stage involves monitoring of the whole process. The System provides a proactive management mechanism. It allows for adaptation when change necessitates such. It also provides for public input and maintains accountability. Terry Cleveland added that the Department does consult with private and public land managers in its development of objectives. He also mentioned that the Commission is the decision-making branch of the Department and acknowledged that they actually set the numbers.

The group then asked questions. Albert Sommers asked if the Department provided a notification that directly identifies and communicates with the people that are affected by the process. Brad Mead asked about the setting of the target and how the Department establishes the maximum carrying capacity. Mr. Smith indicated that the Department reviewed all of the allocation for all users and determines the upper threshold. Terry

Cleveland noted that the feedgrounds allow for a population above carrying capacity. Joel Bousman asked whether the Department deciphers how crowded the feedgrounds are and sets its population objectives accordingly. Mr. Smith indicated that was one of the many factors that is or should be evaluated. Scott Werbelow added that the affected landowners are involved in the process, when populations are above objective, to find a way to manage the elk numbers. Senator Hines asked about landowner participation – as in the Northeast part of Wyoming, landowners do not feel that their input is taken into account and thus, have stopped attending the meetings. Terry Cleveland noted the difficulty in managing herds in the Northeast, because of the ownership patterns in the area and the differing management philosophies of the landowners. Albert Sommers asked if the objectives are reviewed and evaluated annually with the input of other federal and private landowners. Mr. Smith indicated that the objectives are mainly reviewed for whether they are being met. Terry Cleveland indicated that every five or so years, the actual objectives are evaluated for appropriateness. Brent Larson indicated that the Forest Service evaluated the objectives through their planning processes and in other instances (objectives are well exceeded and WGFD could not get a quality harvest, etc.). Marty Griffith mentioned that the BLM involves many different groups when determining its allotment management plans. Bob Wharff praised the WGFD for listening to sportsmen when setting objectives, while adding that the Department might be able to do a better job. He went on to say that when objectives are set counter to public comment, people perceive that they are not being listened to, which is usually not the case. Mr. Smith ended with an admission that it is probably time to commence another five year review.

The second half of Mr. Smith's presentation involved the setting of population goals for the Jackson bison herd. He began with a discussion of the history of the herd, from its reintroduction to present. He highlighted the rapid growth in the herd's population, once winter mortality was reduced with the herd's discovery of the National Elk Refuge feed. Smith then went on to describe the Department's bison management system (Chapter 15 Regulations). He mentioned that the Commission had recently set the herd objective at between 350 and 400 bison. He highlighted the difficulty in harvesting animals, as the only area to harvest animals is on the National Forest adjacent to Grand Teton National Park and the NER. Terry Cleveland added that some bison are harvested on the North Fork of the Shoshone River. He also mentioned that the Department and Livestock Board had identical regulations and collaborate on where in the state bison are classified as wildlife. Dr. Logan asked about the ability to set population goals on lands that the Department has little authority to manage (namely, the NER). Terry Cleveland admitted that such a difficulty does exist. Logan followed on with a question as to why Wyoming does not treat bison like Montana does, jurisdictionally. Bob Wharff asked about the training program to train hunters to collect samples from bison. Smith mentioned that the process involved providing a packet of materials to the hunter, whereas in prior years, it was a more involved, hands-on training program. Rob Hendry asked about increasing the number of permits to achieve a greater harvest. Smith responded that the area was very hunter saturated and thus, any increase in the number of permits would not affect much change.

Setting of Population Goals for the US Department of the Interior – Barry Reiswig:

Population objectives are set on the NER based on a 1974 Cooperative Agreement. This Agreement contemplates four factors: historic population level averages, winter range carrying capacity, cost of supplemental feeding and WGFD objective levels for Jackson Hole. The arrived at number is 7,500. The actual numbers of elk on the NER have dropped to around 6,000. The reason is that the hunt areas adjacent to the NER close earlier to allow elk to go onto those areas to reduce pressure on the NER. Reiswig also noted that the herd was not as productive as it had been in prior years.

The presentation highlighted the difficulty in setting a carrying capacity and the complicated nature of the process. The Model used to establish the carrying capacity indicated that: forage utilization rates were 50% or greater on winter range, in average winters with average pre-winter precipitation – 16,000 elk could find forage and not incur forage deficits on the Greater Teton ecosystems while 5,000 elk (which constitutes a portion of the 16,000 elk within the GTE) could find forage on the NER, winter snow severity negatively affects forage availability, severe drought reduces forage production to 45% of the mean, which increases forage deficits in winter, the increasing number of bison had mild effects on forage deficits in the Greater Teton Ecosystem (the bison have greatly exacerbated deficits on NER), cattle grazing negligibly affects forage deficits and supplemental feeding compensates forage lost due to NER fence. The Model also indicated that adult animal starvation is expected to be relatively low (~5%) but if severe winters occur when the elk population is large, mortality could rise to as high as 30%. The EIS alternatives manipulate 5 variables that affect forage deficits – elk numbers, bison numbers, winter-feeding, willow availability on the NER and irrigation on the NER. The Model is being used to develop the various alternatives in the EIS.

The Team then asked questions of Mr. Reiswig.

Update on Mapping Project – Brandon Scurlock:

Brandon Scurlock updated the group on the mapping project that has been undertaken by the WGFD.

WGFD Budget Issues – Kathy Frank:

Ms. Frank discussed revenue sources, expenditure areas, program changes, cash balances and projections. Revenues from FY01 to FY04 have increased, due to federal fund increases, about \$3 Million (\$41.3 Million). License fees account for \$25.62 Million, federal funds account for \$9.9 Million (both competitive and non-competitive grants), application fees account for \$1.53 Million and interest income generates \$1.5 Million. Private Competitive Grants account for \$.91 Million while the access fund provides \$.67 Million (to purchase access easements). The Annual conservation stamp provides \$.64 Million, boat registration and other revenue sources account for small portions of the Departmental revenues. All revenues are expended on an annual basis as per Wyo. Stat. 23-1-502. Program costs have increased in recent years for access, threatened and endangered species, disease issues (whirling disease, CWD and Brucellosis) and health insurance. Ms. Frank went on to describe the Department's funding of Brucellosis work.

The Team then asked questions of Ms. Frank. The Team asked about deer populations, which were described as being static. The Team also noted that the Threatened and Endangered Species program figures, on revenue received from the USFWS, seemed low and noted that the ESA might be an unfunded mandate. Rob Hendry asked about how much of the Department's money is being expended for aerial surveys, etc. Dr. O'Toole asked what the effect of a 50% loss in elk populations would be in the Department. Ms. Frank approximated the amount to be \$2-3 Million.

Study on Reduction of Feeding in Jackson Hole – Garvice Roby:

The study highlights the ramifications of reduction or elimination of feeding on the elk of Jackson Hole. The study focuses on the three definable wintering areas in the Jackson Hole area: Hunt Area 8, Gros Ventre and Spread Creek drainage and NER. The study concludes, essentially, that fourteen different effects would likely result from a reduction or elimination of feeding (See pp. 14-18 of the Report).

The group then asked questions of Mr. Roby.

Wildlife Best Management Practices:

The Team then dissolved into a discussion surrounding best management practices for wildlife. Dr. Galey will be including changes in a second draft that will be circulated to the Team.

The Team then took public comment.

Adjournment:

Bob Wharff moved to adjourn the August meeting of the Team. Cathy Purves seconded. The vote to adjourn was unanimous.